



Office for
National Statistics

The Development of Well-being Questions in the UK: Lessons Learnt and Observations

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Fieldwork

- 44 interviews conducted over 3 waves of testing
- Questions were administered by telephone and face-to-face
- All cognitive interviews were administered face-to-face
- Primary stratifiers:
 - Sex
 - Age
 - Socio-economic group

Sample also included different ethnic minority grps, educational attainment, household type, geographical spread & long term limiting health issues

Subjective well-being questions

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday
- On a scale where nought is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Additional questions

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your personal relationships
- On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is 'not at all lonely' and 10 is 'extremely lonely' how lonely do you feel in your daily life?
- Overall, how lonely did you feel yesterday?
- On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is 'no control at all' and 10 is 'complete control' how much control do you feel you have over important aspects of your life?

Analysis Model

- Interviews went through 4 key stages
- Development of a thematic framework
- Ordering and summarising of the data
- Classification and categorising the data
- Interpretation
- Peer review & debate followed by further refinement of interpretation

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

- The question was widely understood but R's struggled to describe 'happy'
- Resistance to reporting on just one day
- Scores ranged from 3 to 10, more scores of 10 reported than for any other question
- Evidence of interviewer effects

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

“[I] didn’t want to give a four in case I sounded depressed”

“[I hesitated when responding] because I’m very happy, there’s not much I’d change. A lottery win would be nice. But I really am a very happy bloke but I couldn’t say 10 because that would be showing off”.

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays

“To be perfectly honest, I am really happy at the moment, even though I am not working and have no money. I love the house where I live and I love the people around me, and I feel really, really, content..but in order to have a better quality of life I need to work. So I’d better say, I’d better say seven”

“I suppose I should say a job would be marvellous but frankly that would be a lie and I could get one I hated as much as the last one and go down to a four or five”

Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

- Good comprehension of the question generally
- Younger less educated respondents did not understand the term “worthwhile”
- Scores ranged from two to 10
- Disabled and unemployed became distressed when considering term “worthwhile”

Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

Interviewer: *“And the word worthwhile. What does that word mean to you?”*

Respondent: (Long pause, shrugs shoulders, shuffles, looks embarrassed)

Interviewer: *“There’s no right or wrong answers. It’s just whatever it means to you”*

Respondent: (Long pause) *“I don’t know”*

Interviewer: *“OK, lets say, for instance, someone says they do a job that is really worthwhile. What would you think they meant?”*

Respondent: *“Honestly? I honestly don’t know”*

19 years old, low educational attainment

Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

- Terminology within question understood
- Scale was prone to misunderstanding (reversed polarity)
- Respondents were resistant to answering specifically about “yesterday”
- Scores ranged from 0 to 8. No R’s gave a score of 9 or ten
- Concern over social stigma of reporting a high score

How lonely do you feel in your daily life?

- Good comprehension
- “daily life” was interpreted as Monday to Friday
- Scores ranged from 0 to 8 with 5 being seen as the mid point
- Respondents became distressed when answering this question

Conclusions

- Cognitive ability
- Interviewer effects
- Social desirability
- The right to ask the question – ethics
- Support for respondents and interviewers